

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE 20__-20__ SCHOOL FOOD AUTHORITY
FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEAL POLICY STATEMENT
AND IMPLEMENTING POLICY PROVISIONS**

Below you are given instructions for completing the basic forms and attachments pertaining to:

- ◆ (Section I) the 20__-20__ policy statement for free and reduced price meals;
- ◆ (Section II) the waiver of confidentiality;
- ◆ (Section III) direct certification; and
- ◆ (Section IV) Special Assistance Provisions 1, 2, and 3.

We are hopeful that the information provided will expedite the school food authority's submission and State approval of the 2003-2004 Policy Statement Renewal. **You are not required to return these instructions with your Policy Statement Renewal.** However, a copy of the instructions and this Policy Statement should be retained locally for implementation, instruction and guidance on confidentiality, direct certification, and Provisions 1, 2, and 3 for determining eligibility and claiming meals.

SECTION I.

Specific form identification and instructions for both completion and implementation of the Policy Statement are as follows. **(Please note that school food authorities are not required to submit a full Policy Statement to the State Office. The signature and renewal forms with appropriate revised attachments are required. Note that the renewal form must be signed by the district superintendent or his/her authorized designee since this individual is accepting responsibility and must have full authority for all site actions as they relate to free and reduced price policy.)**

1. **PROGRAM IDENTIFICATION** - Indicate if the school food authority intends to participate in Special Assistance Provisions 1, 2, or 3.
2. **BASIC POLICY PAGES** - The basic policy consists of four pages and contains assurances and agreements under which the district and/or school will operate its feeding programs.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING: Blank spaces on pages 1 and 4 of the Policy Statement are to be completed with the appropriate information for each school food authority. If signature provided on page 4 is not that of district superintendent or comparable school food authority representative, we must receive written authorization for the designee's signature.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING: Once approved, copies of the Policy Statement (including basic pages and attachments), must be kept on file in the school food authority's office and at each school or program site. School food authorities are asked to make sufficient copies of the approved policy for distribution to each school/site. The Policy Statement as well as all food service records must be retained on file three years plus the current school year. **Current approved renewals must be retained on file with the most recently approved full Policy Statement.**

3. **ATTACHMENT (A)** - Attachment A provides the complete "Household Size and Income Guidelines for Free and Reduced Price Meals" to be used for determining eligibility for school year 20__-20__.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING: Attachment A, like the basic policy, should be adapted to conform to each school food authority's intention to operate programs. References made to programs not applicable should be deleted.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING: The "Household Size and Income Guidelines" provide the basic criteria for determining recipient eligibility. Therefore, it is imperative that approving officials use this scale when determining a student's eligibility.

4. **ATTACHMENT (B)** - Attachment B includes the "Letter to Household" which is customized to accompany either the single or multi-child meal application form included in this prototype package. Federal regulations require that this letter or a similar one be sent to all parents or guardians of children attending public school in each district and in private and parochial schools operating a pricing program. The letter includes the upper limits of the "Household Size and Income Guidelines" which must be sent home to each household.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING: When using this sample letter or a revised letter, the following instructions apply:

- a) Modify letter by deleting references to any programs that the school does not intend to operate.
- b) Complete blank spaces by filling in information appropriate for the school food authority. Since prices charged to students may vary from school to school within a school district, the district may omit prices charged on the attachment when submitting to the State Office. However, in all cases, each school must complete the price charged information on its file copy of the approved Policy Statement. The same procedure as described above pertains to the approving official's signature.

For school food authorities that will develop their own letter the following instructions apply:

- a) Develop letter and attach to basic policy. The State Office will determine acceptability of the letter's content. In no case should a school food authority transmit a revised letter to parents prior to State approval.

Note to all pricing programs--A "reduced price lunch" is a lunch costing no more than 40 cents to any student eligible for a reduced price meal as determined by the income guidelines, and a "reduced price breakfast" is a breakfast costing no more than 30 cents to such students. **These prices for reduced price meals are established by Federal law and cannot be increased locally.**

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING: The "Letter to Households" must be sent home to each household at the beginning of the school year with a free and reduced price meal application form unless the household has been notified of pre-approved benefits as a result of direct certification. Keep in mind that an application must be made available to every student in such a manner to protect the needy students from overt identification. This may mean providing the household letter and application to every student regardless of direct certification status.

5. **ATTACHMENT (C)** - Attachment C includes two versions of a meal application form with instructions to be used by households when seeking approval for free or reduced price meals for their children. Unless a multi-child or household application is used, separate application forms must be completed for each child for whom eligibility is being sought. School food authorities are requested to duplicate application forms sufficient to meet their needs. Attachment C represents 4 separate pages: two application forms (a one-page single child and a one-page multi-child form) and two instruction sheets. Choose only the application form and the appropriate instruction sheet that the school food authority intends to use. **These forms and instructions may not be altered or changed in any manner without written approval from the State Office.**

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING: Delete all references to programs which the district or school does not intend to operate.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING: Approved application forms are the primary source from which federal reimbursement is granted. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the procedures followed in implementing and approving applications be taken seriously and followed to the letter. If the following practices are adhered to, each school food authority should be assured of compliance with the application aspect of the free and reduced price policy statement.

- a) The approving authority must review each application to ensure information is complete. All data requested, including data supplied by the approving authority, are considered pertinent and must be completed.

- b) Approval of each application must be based on:
 - household size and income guidelines prescribed by the Secretary of Agriculture or the provision of a food stamp or a TANF case number (Medicaid and EBT numbers are **not** acceptable.),
 - household membership, current monthly income by source for each household member,
 - social security number of the adult household member signing form, if income is used to determine eligibility, and
 - parent or guardian signature on each application.
- c) Applications must be maintained in a central file at the district office or at the school. The applications must be arranged either alphabetically, by grade, or by homeroom or in some manner to be readily retrievable for each participating school.
- d) A master list or a record system must be maintained for transfer students - such a list or record system must contain as a minimum, the date students entered or left school, the name of the school they transferred to or from, the date their application was approved and the category of eligibility (free or reduced). The application form includes a line item for entering withdrawal dates.

During the school year, schools have up to three operating days to effect benefit increases and ten days to have negative benefit changes in place.

All applications, both those approved and denied, must be kept on file for a period of three years following the school year in which they were approved or until audit resolution if an audit exception is taken.

Schools which (a) serve 80 percent needy and schools (b) which choose to serve all children free and pay the difference in costs from program funds or local revenues may, upon State approval, extend free and reduced price meal eligibility for a period of (a) two and (b) up to four years respectively based on applications filed the first year. See Section IV of this instruction/implementation document for specific discussion of the Special Assistance Provisions 1, 2, and 3.

6. **ATTACHMENT (D)** - Attachment D is a Notification of Eligibility Letter to be used by the approving authorities to inform applicants as to eligibility status.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING: Complete blank spaces by filling in the appropriate information concerning the procedure for children to follow to receive meals and references to the hearing official. The hearing official must be an individual who is not involved with the approval or verification process.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING: Federal regulations require that each applicant receive a notice regarding eligibility determination. All action regarding eligibility determinations should be taken within ten (10) working days on all applications submitted. **In those cases where applications are denied, a copy of the eligibility determination sent to the household must be kept on file with the application with the reason for denial.**

Federal regulations stipulate that children whose parents or guardians become unemployed may be eligible to receive free or reduced price meals during the period of unemployment if loss of income causes the current rate of household income to be within the eligibility criteria.

Because unemployment is normally temporary in nature, approval should be made for a limited period of time. It is the school's responsibility to establish temporary approval on an individual case basis and to notify the household of the conditions of a temporary approval. (Note: The only indicator of a temporary approval on the application form may be "0" or "no income" unless a household indicates otherwise.) Those households seeking continued assistance must reapply by submitting a new application.

Applications submitted for temporary approval must include household size, current gross income such as salaries or wages of other household members who are working, unemployment compensation or other income benefits received even though unemployment exits. A separate file or listing of temporary approvals should be maintained and re-negotiated at a minimum of three times during the school year: November 15, January 15, and March 15 as long as the temporary status continues.

7. **ATTACHMENT (E)** - Attachment E is a sample public media release which is to be used by the school food authority when making public announcements regarding its Free and Reduced Price Policy.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING: Complete blank spaces by filling in information appropriate for the school food authority. Copies of any published articles or the release sent to newspapers must be submitted or maintained with the Policy Statement. **In addition, list all newspapers and/or publishers who were sent the release.**

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING: Regulations require that prior to or during the first week of school, a public release be made to the local news media, the unemployment office and any major employers who are contemplating layoffs within the school's attendance area. When sent to the news media, the letter to households, an application form and a complete income scale (free and reduced-price guidelines) or the same information put in a narrative form will constitute a public release.

The requirement is to **provide** the information described above to the news media. It is **not** the school food authority's responsibility to ensure that the information is published in the newspapers. **A copy of the information provided to the media and the letter of transmittal should be retained to serve as Attachment E of the policy statement.** If the information is published, a copy of the published material should also be included as part of Attachment E. Copies of the public release must be made available upon request to any interested party. The public release **must** contain **both** the free and reduced-price income eligibility guidelines.

8. **ATTACHMENT (F)** – Attachment F provides a description of the meal count/collection procedure(s) and options used for breakfast and lunch in schools. In an effort to standardize meal count/collection procedures used throughout the state and to simplify the task of writing such procedures for school personnel, a checklist approach to completing Attachment F is used. With the new School Nutrition Automated Claims System (SNACS) to be implemented beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, this attachment will no longer be used to capture the medium of exchange and meal count procedure for each site or school. This information will be coded in by site on the SNAC system and the completion of profile information prior to program approval. Attachment F will still be the vehicle for obtaining the specifics on the collection of revenues, charging policies, procedures used to prevent overt identification, and point of service accountability. **Information needed on individual school site count procedures will be entered during the web-based application process wherein all sites intending to operate the school meal programs must be listed and certain key data provided prior to approval.**

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETION: It is imperative that the School Food Service Supervisor or Director meet with local school principals, cashiers, and other program personnel to fully interpret and explain collection and meal count procedures required for compliance with Federal regulations. The proper implementation of procedures for obtaining an accurate meal count by category at the point of service on a daily basis needs to be fully discussed. An early morning count is not sufficient unless confirmed for each student at the point of service.

The meal count procedure indicated for an individual school or site in the application process must be the same as the procedure actually used. If a change must be made, a statement describing in detail such a procedure and signed by the District Superintendent or an appropriate school food authority representative must be submitted to the State Office for approval prior to the effective date of implementation. You will then receive instructions on how this revised procedure must be entered on the site profile to keep the SNACS current.

Note that for schools participating in the Afterschool Snack Program, a meal count procedure code must be identified for this program as well.

9. **ATTACHMENT G** - Notification of Selection for Verification of Eligibility – This letter or notice must be sent to any household selected for verification unless the verification is of categorical eligibility and done through the county DSS office or another state agency. Students eligible free as a result of direct certification are not subject to verification.
10. **ATTACHMENT H** - Letter of Verification Results – This notice/letter must be sent to any household whose eligibility for meal benefits will be reduced or terminated due to verification. This notice/letter must be sent 10 calendar days before the change in benefits occurs.
11. **ATTACHMENT I** - Verification Tracker/Roster for School Use – The tracker and the roster are two forms designed for a school or the district to use to document all actions taken for each student selected for verification of eligibility. All actions taken as a result of verification must be maintained for audit and review purposes. These two forms are tools for collecting and summarizing this required information.
12. **ATTACHMENT J** - Notice/Letter of Predetermined Eligibility – A prototype Notice/Letter of Predetermined Eligibility **must** be sent to any household certified as eligible for free meal benefits through direct certification. The names of household members appearing on the direct certification document for the 2003-2004 school year should be entered on the letter and sent to the household prior to the first day of school, when possible. The purpose of direct certification is to provide for pre-approval of students for free meals based on their current eligibility for food stamps or TANF payments and thus eliminating the need for the completion of a meal application. **Note that direct certification is only available to public schools in South Carolina because of the database needed to complete the match.**